

## THE FKIABS

latest reports circulated.<sup>1</sup> From this centre he was sent out on beat to certain specified villages and towns ; these he continually visited and revisited, returning ever and again to his convent with the winnings of his tour, which went to the common purse. Thus it happened that when the monasteries had ceased to play an important part in the national life, when the parish priests were too often on a level with the peasantry to whom they ministered, the friars remained the chief religious influence throughout England. This influence they used, so their many enemies declared, chiefly to get money for the splendour of their banquets, the adornment of their convents, and the enrichment of their treasuries. The begging friar was loyal at least to his order. By every means arising from the credulity and superstition of those to whom he ministered, he collected alms and donations not for himself, but for the corporation of which he was a member. His energy was further stimulated by the rivalry of the four great orders among themselves. They all competed with each other on the same ground and with the same weapons. The dislike of the Franciscan for the Dominican, of the Dominican for the Augustinian, of the Augustinian for the Carmelite, was only equalled by the dislike of the parish priest for all four together.<sup>2</sup> Although the chiefs might have a common policy in high quarters at London or Oxford, the rivalry of their subordinates on the scene of their missionary labours was inevitable. The friars, therefore, even after they had established their reputation, continued their ministry under all the stimulus which the voluntary system and severe competition can give.

To suppose that during the last centuries of Catholicism in England the people were left by the Church without spiritual leadership, and with insufficient ministration, is to leave the mendicant orders out of account. To attribute the popularity of the Lollard sermons to the insufficient number of orthodox preachers, is to neglect Wyclif's own statement that the friars understood and practised the art of popular

<sup>1</sup> *Franciscana*, Appendix  
viii. \* P. Pl. i Creed. E.  
E. T. S.